NORTHERN LIGHT

THE MAGAZINE OF TOC H IN ICELAND

PRICE: 1 KRÓNA NO. 4 JANUARY 1942

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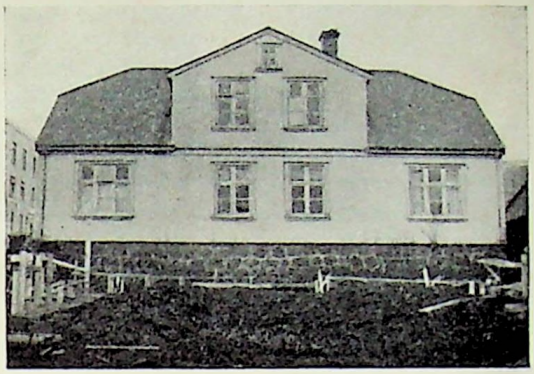
THE TOC H SERVICES CLUB.



TÚNGATA 6
REYKJAVÍK.

The outstanding event since our last issue has been, for us, the visit of Tubby Clayton to Iceland. He arrived by air one cold and windy November morning, and although his visit was an official one connected with R.A.F. welfare, managed to spend several evenings with us in the House. He blew in unexpectedly to a meeting of the Toc H Group, and those who were privileged to hear his talk on that occasion will long remember it. He was present at two of the weekly Communion Services in our chapel and on each occasion a cheerful breakfast party followed. He returned by air to England in order to join a tanker as chaplain, and will spend the rest of the winter in convoys on the high seas. We wish him Godspeed, and are confident that the men on the tankers he visits will find him, as we did, a source of real encouragement and inspiration.

* *

Both the House and the Toc H Group within it have suffered a serious loss by the departure from the island of Padre Dick Craig, who from the very beginning has thrown himself wholeheartedly into the life and work of the Club. His wise and practical counsel, his cheerful presence and his willingness to turn his hand to anything that needed doing, have all been quite invaluable assets, while his work in and for the House chapel has more than anything else been instrumental in establishing it and all it stands for at the heart of the House's work. We are thankful that Padre Robertson remains with us, and have no fear as to the future so long as he remains.

* *

Toc H in Iceland was privileged to forge the first and last link in the 1941 World Chain of Light. This simple act, designed to bring home to Toc H members all round the world their essential unity of kinship and purpose, is carried out every year on the anniversary of the opening of the first Talbot House in Poperinghe in 1915. Branches and Groups and members in the Western Hemisphere everywhere stood to their lamps and rushlights for the Ceremony of Light at 9 p.m. on December 11th, and in the Eastern hemisphere on December 12th at the same time, and in this way a chain of Toc H lights may be imagined girdling the earth during those twenty-four hours. In the

chapel of our house here in Reykjavik the first lamp was lighted and the light started on its long journey. Members of Toc H shared a twenty-four hour vigil in the chapel until the light was received back again after completing the circuit. An account of the vigil and of the simple services which opened and closed it appears on page 4.

* *

A cable was received from the Headquarters of Toc H India, despatched from Calcutta, at the time at which Indian units were lighting their lamps, and reading:

> "Toc H India Burma standing round their lamps and rushlights send greetings to Toc H Iceland."

We know that in many other parts of the world we in Iceland were much in the thoughts of our brother members during those hours.

Probably the most completely isolated of all the Toc H units sharing in the Chain was the branch in Oflag VI B, the prison camp at Warburg on the borders of Westphalia and Hesse, where prisoner members have formed a unit.

* *

A new series of talks, under the title of "America To-Day", has now been started at our Tuesday evening Toc H meetings, and we have welcomed a number of American speakers to the House, including Captain Colley and Captain Leon, both of the U.S. Marine Corps. We have already learnt a great deal about our great ally from these new friends and are feeling properly ashamed of the mist of ignorance and misapprehension under which we have been living. We hope to continue this series for some time.

* *

Another welcome visitor has been Mr. Robin Duff, the B.B.C. War Commentator at present in Iceland, whose talk on the B.B.C. in Wartime was greatly appreciated.

* *

Our Musical Society continues to flourish and the Monday evening Concerts of Gramophone Records are still regularly packed out. Major P. T. L. Browne's apparently inexhaustible supply of records is still unreservedly at our disposal and we owe him a tremendous debt both for his loan of these and for his regular presence at the concerts and his introductory and explanatory comments.

* *

The Play-Reading and Literary Society are at present hard at work preparing for a full reading of "Macbeth", quite the most ambitious project it has yet tackled. The only other play read since our last issue has been A. A. Milne's "The Truth about Blayds", though one or two shorter excerpts have been tried, including the tent scene from "St. Joan", and an American radio poem by Stephen Vincent Benet, entitled "Tell it to the People". We have also had a further and delightful talk from Major E. Cousins on "British Films", and a most interesting and amusing talk on "Hollywood" by Captain Franklin Adreon of the U.S. Marine Corps, who before the war was a Hollywood script writer. The monthly "Spare My Blushes" evenings for the original work of members continue and have produced some very excellent work. Plans for the future include further Shakespeare plays and a reading of "Jupiter Laughs" by A. J. Cronin. Numbers are, if anything, on the increase, and the presence of several Nursing Sisters who read the female parts in the plays is a very great asset.

* *

Both the Male Voice Choir and the Tic Tocs Concert Party have been somewhat decimated by recent movements of troops, but both are courageously carrying on. The former gave their third performance on the air recently, under the direction of S. S. M. Palfery.

The Tic Tocs are in the throes of drastic reorganisation but are in the meantime doing excellent service in smaller and more isolated camps.

A GUEST NIGHT FOR ICELANDERS

On Tuesday 9th December an Icelandic Guest Night was held in the house. Many members of H.M. Forces in Iceland have Icelandic friends into whose homes they have been welcomed, and the idea of this function was to give such men an opportunity of repaying by proxy some of the hospitality they had received. About fifty Icelanders of both sexes accepted invitations to attend, and the House was closed for the evening to all except these guests and their British hosts. After coffee and cakes, the party assembled in the large ground floor room, pleasantly decorated for the occasion, and Alec Churcher made a short and simple speech of welcome. He said:

"Friends,

As the representative of Toc H in Iceland I want first of all to offer a very warm welcome to all our Icelandic friends who have come to visit us this evening. We British here are a very long way from our homes, and many hundreds of miles of dangerous seas separate us from our fathers and our mothers, our children, our brothers and sisters, and from all those whom we love. We are a home-loving people and in these evil times, when war compels us to leave our homes behind us for many long months, we are especially grateful to those of you in this island who have welcomed us as guests into y o u r homes. It is hard perhaps for you to realise how much this has meant to us, and we thank you.

You in Iceland have a tradition of hospitality to the stranger. We British also take pride that we do not forget a kindness, and that we always remember and return the hospitality we receive. All of us here wish, I know, that it was possible for us to invite you into our homes. But that cannot be, at any rate until we have won this war. So we are trying this evening to do the next best thing, and have invited you instead to this house of Toc H, which does its best to be as much like a home as it can to the many soldiers, sailors and airmen who spend a good part of their leisure time within its walls.

The Toc H Society believes that all mankind should be one great family, and it has worked since the last war, when it was founded, to create goodwill and understanding between individual people and members of different nations and races. One of our leaders has said that "To conquer hate would be to end the strife of all the ages, but for men to know one another is not difficult and it is half the battle."

I hope that as result of this evening a few of your people and a few of my people may have learnt to know and understand one another better, for after all we a r e all members of one family.

The other day I saw written up an Icelandic proverb. I have tried to learn to pronounce it. Please excuse me if I do not do it very well.

"Höfuðprýði húss er tíður góður gestur." "The chief ornament of a house is the coming of good guests."

I think that is a very good proverb. This house is the richer tonight because is has received so many new ornaments."

An hour's entertainment then followed, arranged by Corporal Soar who acted as compere. S.Q.M.S. Plush played the piano, Corporal Jolly sang English songs, and Coder Joe Walsh proved himself equally at home with violin, saxophone and penny whistle, while his ability to explain himself in Icelandic was greatly appreciated. Members of the Toc H Male Voice Choir concluded the programme with a group of part songs.

Alec then briefly explained the Ceremony of Light and its meaning and significance. He spoke slowly and simply, and we sincerely hope his words were understood. In the darkened room, soldiers, sailors and airmen stood among their guests around the lamp's tiny flame, and as Corporal Soar spoke the familiar words it may be that the first foundations of a new bridgehead of Toc H may have been laid in a land whose geographical position makes it a natural stepping-stone between the Old World and the New. Truly we who are Toc H members in Iceland

have a big responsibility upon our shoulders.

The party then disintegrated into numerous small groups, every room in the House containing little parties of three and four round a table, consuming more coffee and cakes, and successfully overcoming the language difficulty. Our Icelandic guests as usual shamed us by their proficiency in English, compared with our own ineffectiveness at Icelandic.

In the canteen, chairs were cleared away and a dance started up which continued until the evening was brought to a close by the singing of "Auld Lang Syne" to which there are Icelandic words written for the same tune.

Such a party would have been unthinkable twelve months ago, and unlikely even six months ago. Toc H would like to think that it had a very small share in the building of these better relationships, based on increased understanding of each other's point of view by a growing number of individuals of both countries. At any rate we shall go on quietly working at it. Here is a Toc H job worthy of the best of us — and a job which brings its own rich reward.

THE WORLD CHAIN OF LIGHT 1941

(The purpose and significance of this annual symbolic act of unity by Toc H branches all over the world is described in the opening paragraphs of this issue. As there recorded, the privilege of forging the first and last links in the Chain fell this time to Toc H in Iceland.)

In these days, when mens' faith is being tested almost to the limit of endurance, and perplexity and doubt prevail on all sides, the World Chain of Light has an added significance for all Toc H members. Spiritually it can be regarded as a symbol that the flame which Christ lit in the world still burns in these days of darkness and must eventually encompass the whole earth. The lights kindled round the world by members of Toc H are dim, but they shine out in the darkness as a tiny part of the fire which must purify the world if, as we believe, the Spirit of God is to prevail.

To the members of Toc H in Iceland was given the double privilege of beginning the Chain of Light and of receiving it back again at the end of its journey, while to our padre, Dick Craig, fell the task of composing the message which was sent for the occasion to every unit of Toc H, save those in occupied territory.

The newly-formed Group at the "X" General Hospital, as the most northerly unit in the world, had the honour of actually kindling the first light. They valued the honour highly, and made every effort to keep the vigil, in spite of the smallness of their numbers and the difficulties of duties. At the House in Reykjavik, members assembled in the beautiful and simple little chapel in the loft and drew inspiration from the very impressive service which Dick Craig conducted. Alec Churcher, as the oldest member present, took "Light", and in that setting the simple and familiar ceremony will long be remembered by all who were present. About twenty members shared the twenty-four hours of vigil which followed, and the fact that a number of units gave special facilities to enable men to take their part is perhaps a tribute to the good name which Toc H, through its quiet service, has acquired with H.M. Forces in the island. At the end of the twenty-four hours, Padre Robertson led the concluding service, and "Light" was taken by Private Fred Denaro, the Group's newest member. All who were present felt the inspiration, drawn from the happy

atmosphere of the chapel, to carry on cheerfully and wholeheartedly in the fight for the overthrow of Evil in all its forms.

W. J.

We print below the Message, written by Dick Craig, and used by all branches:

".... The Chain this year starts from the most northern stronghold which Toc H has yet reached — the Group which gathers around the Lamp in the Services Club in Reykjavik, Iceland. It is composed entirely of Service men and the whole reason for their existence in that country is that they may watch—steadily straining their eyes so that the vital sea-lanes of the Atlantic may be kept open for the safety of the world.

"Guard", "Watch", "Patrol" are the commonest words on the lips of soldier, sailor and airman. They understand what it means to keep vigil, and they also understand the meaning of light. On December 11th at 9 p.m. darkness will already be six hours old, and it will be twelve hours more before the dawn—eighteen hours of mingled boredom and danger. They have long ceased to think of the "cosy comfort" of artifical light. They have learned to thank God for His good gift of the sun, and long to see more of it. Arctic night is a wearsome and dangerous thing.

How much of the light of the world between World War No. I and World War No. II was artifical light? The human family was surely, as it were, living in a room with the black-out curtains drawn. The glorious God-given sun was shining all the time, but the world preferred its own light. From time to time great Christian movements and great Christian individuals would tear away a little of the curtain, but most of the light was still man-made. Now the war has come and the "mains" have been cut off!

Yes, the men of the Forces in Iceland understand this business of light, and some of them are determined that they will help to tear down some of those black-out curtains before they die. Others see it differently in other parts of the world ,but we rejoice that our purpose is the same, as throughout the twenty-four hours now beginning the lamps burst into flame; that after this darkness is over we who realize now the inadequate sources of our light will turn for real sunshine to the source of all true light—Jesus Christ Our Lord."

7.45 IN THE CHAPEL

Family Prayers are now being held daily in the chapel and we want you particularly to make a note of them: "7.45 in the chapel" every evening except Sunday.

They were started after several requests from Toc H members and some of those many others who help to make the club into a home by their hard, though self-effacing, work. Some of them felt that although the main purpose of the chapel is for the private prayers of those who cannot get peace and quiet in their camps, yet it would also be a real benefit if all those who were available could come together for Family Prayers. It was agreed that it would be a real help to the work of the House, and would also be a help to the individuals taking part.

So do please — all those of you who wish to see the Toc H House prosper — make a special note of the time — "7.45 in the chapel" every evening except Sunday. Whenever you are nearby at that time, come in. In this way the House will benefit from the prayers of those who have learnt to love it, and the family spirit which we all want to see there will be strengthened and sustained. As Our Lord himself said: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

R. N. C.

RAUFARHÖFN
THORSHÖFN
ISAFJÖRDUR
SIGLUFJÖRDUR
HUSAVIK
VOPNAFJÖRDUR
AKUREYRI
HOFSOS
SKAGASTRÖND
SAUDÁRKRÓKUR
BLÖNDUOS
KUVIKR
FLÓI
HUNA-
THINGEYRI
FLATEYRI
BILDUDALR
VATNEYRI
FLATEY
BREIDIFJÖRDUR
STYKKISHOLMUR
BORGARNES
ÓLAFSVÍK
GRUNDARFJÖRDUR
BUDIR
SKEIDARÁRJÖKULL
FAXA-FJÖRDUR
REYKJAVIK
KEFLAVIK
EYRARBAKKI
VESTMANNAEYJAR
PORTLAND
VIK
VATNA JÖKULL
ÖRÆFA JÖKULL
SEYDISFJÖRDUR
DJUPIVOGUR
HORNAFJÖRDUR
Grimsey
Hvarf (Cape Nord)
Adalvik
Kalfhamarsvik
Skagafjördur
Eyjafjördur
Axarfjördur
Thistilfjördur
Langanes
Gunnólfsvik
Rakkafjördur
Sléttanes
Sugandafjördur
Önundarfjördur
Dýrafjördur
Arnarfjördur
Tálknafjördur
Patreksfjördur
Breidavik
Hrútafjördur
Hvammsfjördur
Borgarfjördur
Seydisfjördur
Reydarfjördur
Fáskrudsfjördur
Stödvarfjördur
Breiddalsvik
Berufjördur
Lón
Hvalfjördur
Faxaflói
Skerjafjördur
Hafnarfjördur
Kollafjördur
Hvalfell
Gullhagi
Kidagil
Hofsjökull
Kalmanstunga
Hlödufell
Kerlingarfjöll
Hekla
Thjórsá
Ölfusá
Krísuvík
Grindavík
Reykjanes
Eldey
Fuglasker
Stakksgrýti
Bergthórshvoll
Markarfljót
Ingólfshöfdi
Breidamerkursandur
Skeidarársandur
Kaldafellsstadir
Vopnafjördur
Hallormstadr
Egilsstadir
Eidar
Mödrudalur
Thverá
Dettifoss
Ásbyrgi
Kópasker
Grímsey
Flatey
Dalvik
Ólafsfjördur
Siglufjördur
Akureyri
Blönduos
Skagaströnd
Saudárkrókur
Hofsós
Kvikvar
Thingeyri
Flateyri
Ísafjördur
Bildudalr
Vatneyri
Flatey
Stykkisholmur
Borgarnes
Ólafsvík
Grundarfjördur
Budir
Reykjavik
Keflavik
Eyrarbakki
Vestmannaeyjar
Portland
Vik
Vatna Jökull
Öræfa Jökull
Seydisfjördur
Djupivogur
Hornafjördur

ICELAND.

ICELAND — LAND OF FROST AND FIRE

by Mr. Vigfús Einarsson (Ministry of Interior and Communications).

Remote from all other countries, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, a stepping stone between the New and Old World, lies Iceland.

It is the largest island in Europe after Britain, having an area of 40,000 square miles.

Iceland is a very mountainous country, consisting of basalt lava and other volcanic rock with, however, a large area of lowlands, especially in the south and the southwest. Otherwise there is very little lowland, except at the heads of the fjords and in the great many valleys which stretch from the numerous fjords and bays up into the highlands. Except for some rounded hills and shallow depressions the central part of the country is an unbroken plateau, eleven to twenty-six hundred feet high. In the interior, a great deal of the territory, especially the higher mountains, is covered with a cap of eternal snow.

Iceland is the most volcanic country in the world, and is, perhaps, most widely known for her volcanoes. Volcanic signs can be seen everywhere. Not only the mountains but great plains are covered with lava, often like a furious sea which has suddenly become stilled. This is something more than a simile, because the lava was once a roaring current of boiling rock. Over a hundred eruptions have been recorded since the country was first inhabited. In later years, however, volcanic eruptions have not been frequent, and most of them have taken place in the centre of the country far from human habitation.

The most famous of all volcanoes in Iceland is Hekla, a familiar name in every country. In former times this mountain was considered unmistakable proof of the existence of Hell. For several centuries people refrained from climbing Mount Hekla because it was believed to be the chimney of the dark abode underneath, but during later years it has become quite popular. A return trip to the top of Hekla, with a neighbouring farm as a starting point, takes ten to twelve hours. The view from the top is magnificent and well worth the somewhat strenuous trip, which is accomplished partly by the aid of ponies.

In Iceland there are many glaciers under which are volcanic craters in various places, as, for instance, in the western area of Vatnajökull, which, in recent years, has commanded attention on account of volcanic eruptions. A number of Icelandic and foreign scientists have climbed the glacier in order to investigate this peculiar phenomon of ice and fire. It is fantastic to visualize these two opposing forces in conflict, fire breaking its way through hundreds of feet of solid ice.

Hot springs and geysers are to be found all over the country, even in the rivers, on the sea bed and under the glaciers. The most famous of all the hot springs is the Great Geysir about eighty miles from Reykjavik; from its spouting, springs all over the world have derived their name. After having witnessed an eruption of the Great Geysir which lasted for twenty minutes, a Scottish captain remarked: "This power would have sailed half a dozen of Queen Marys right across the Atlantic." This unbroken column of scalding water and steam that rises from one hundred and sixty to one hundred and eighty feet up into the air is impressive and affords a spectacle never to be forgotten. The internal heat of the earth is a tremendous source of power. During recent years the Icelanders have been busy harnessing this heat and power. This is done chiefly by heating houses, buildings, swimming basins and greenhouses. Not only are a great number of individual farms heated by the thermal springs, but

certain public buildings as well, such as the larger country schools. It is of special interest for the traveller to note that many of these country schools are used as hotels during the summer season. In these places one can have outdoor and indoor swimming in warm water. The houses, in a considerable part of Reykjavik, are already heated by the thermal springs near the city, and we have reason to hope that a heating system of this kind will cover the entire city in a not too distant future. After that no chimneys will be built in Reykjavik. The greenhouses, supplied with natural heat, are already busy producing flowers as well as tropical fruit.

There are numerous rivers in Iceland and some of them have great volumes of water. Most of the larger ones have their origin under the glaciers and are of an opaque, greyish colour, on account of the glacial clays. Others, rising from springs,, are crystal clear. Most of the rivers are now spanned with bridges, but one can still imagine what it meant to ford them on ponies.

These huge rivers, rapid and powerful, sometimes run peacefully, although with a hidden strength, over fertile plains; sometimes plunge in tremendous falls, thundering on their way, and where the rivers drop down from the highlands, magnificent and beautiful waterfalls are formed. The most remarkable of these are Dettifoss in the north and Gullfoss in the south.

The water power in the country is enormous, and year by year it is being more and more utilized. At present it is giving light and heat to thousands of homes in Iceland. But the rivers in Iceland provide another asset; in a number of them the salmon are abundant, as are the trout in the many lakes in different parts of the country.

The lava-fields of Iceland are numerous and extensive, especially in the uninhabited part of the country, the most remarkable of these being Ódáðahraun, the largest lava-field in the world.

Iceland has often been called "the land of contrasts" and it justly deserves the name. This is a land where the snow-white caps of the mountains cover the intense fire beneath, where you can take a bath in hot-spring water out in the open during the severe part of the winter; the inhabited valleys and plains are friendly, inviting and charming, the lava deserts desolate, barren and awe-inspiring. Beautiful lakes and rivers winding through green pastures and fertile meadows with their gushing geysers are a sharp contrast to the sparkling glaciers, those fields of snow and ice, where no birds sing, and where nature is dead and silent except when the wind sweeps over the white desert.

The Climate.

The name of the country and its geographical situation have given rise to the prevalent erroneous ideas about the island. Fortunately, however, there is very little similarity between the name and the country itself.

The climate of Iceland is a maritime climate: not particularly warm in summer and not very cold in winter. As for the temperature, it is interesting to note that the mean temperature in January in Reykjavik, the capital, is about 30 degrees Fahrenheit. The mean summer temperature is 52 degrees Fahrenheit. The mean temperature of the whole year is 39 degrees Fahrenheit, which is similar to Quebec. In Reykjavik we very seldom have snow, and on the lowlands snow rarely lies for long; on the mountains, however, it lies deep, making ideal conditions for wintersports.

The Population.

And now, who are the people who inhabit this "land of frost and fire", as Iceland is sometimes called?

The people of Iceland are descendants of Scandinavian vikings who were full of

In the Quiet Valley.

vitality, eager in exploiting new countries and seeking freedom, as Leif the Lucky, the Icelander who discovered America.

Iceland was colonized mainly by Norse vikings, who wanted to throw off the political yoke of Harald the Fairhaired of Norway. But a considerable part of the early settlers came from the British Isles, principally from Scotland and Ireland. The Icelanders are therefore a Scandinavian people with a mixture of Celtic blood.

Hrafna-Flóki was the first viking who intended to settle down in Iceland, but he left the country after a short stay,

somewhat disappointed, as due to lack of foresight he gathered no hay for the sheep he had brought with him and therefore lost them all. Before he left the country he climbed a high mountain and saw a firth full of ice. This gave him the idea of giving the country the uninviting and rather misleading name it bears.

In the year 874 the first settler of Iceland, Ingólfur Arnarson, landed on the south coast of the country. Three years later he built his homestead where Reykjavik now stands. Reykjavik claims the distinction of being specially selected by the gods themselves to become the leading place of the country. According to the tradition, Ingólfur, when he sighted land, threw overboard his high seat pillars, declaring that he would settle down where the gods deigned to have them driven ashore. After a three-year search he found them where is now the harbour of Reykjavik.

Sixty years after the settlement of Ingólfur the population was about 50,000; these self-willed vikings made their homes here, becoming a nation of farmers and creating their own history and culture.

In the summer of 930 the people established a code of laws. This legislative assembly, the Althing, the oldest parliament in the world, used to gather every summer at a place called Thingvellir.

In the year 1000 the Christian faith was adopted by law. In the same year, Leifur, called the Lucky, discovered America, which he called Vinland. In commemoration of this event, the Congress of the United States of America presented Iceland with an impressive statue of Leifur the Lucky at the one thousandth anniversary of the Icelandic Parliament in 1930.

Political Relations.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, through changes in political relations, Iceland became united first with Norway and later with Denmark.

The loss of political freedom, epidemics and widespread poverty and hardships for many years caused the population to diminish to about one-third of what it was at the time of the republic. But during the last few dacades the Icelandic people seem to have taken a new life. In 1918, after a long and strenuous political struggle, Iceland became an independent and sovereign state in personal union with Denmark through a common king. Since the restoration of the power of administration, a steady and far-reaching change has taken place in the mode of living and general conditions in the country.

When Germany occupied Denmark on the 10th of April 1940 all communications between Iceland and the latter country broke down, and the powers held by the King under the Iceland constitution are now vested in a Regent, elected by the Althing (Parliament). Except for this there has been no change in the form of government.

The Language.

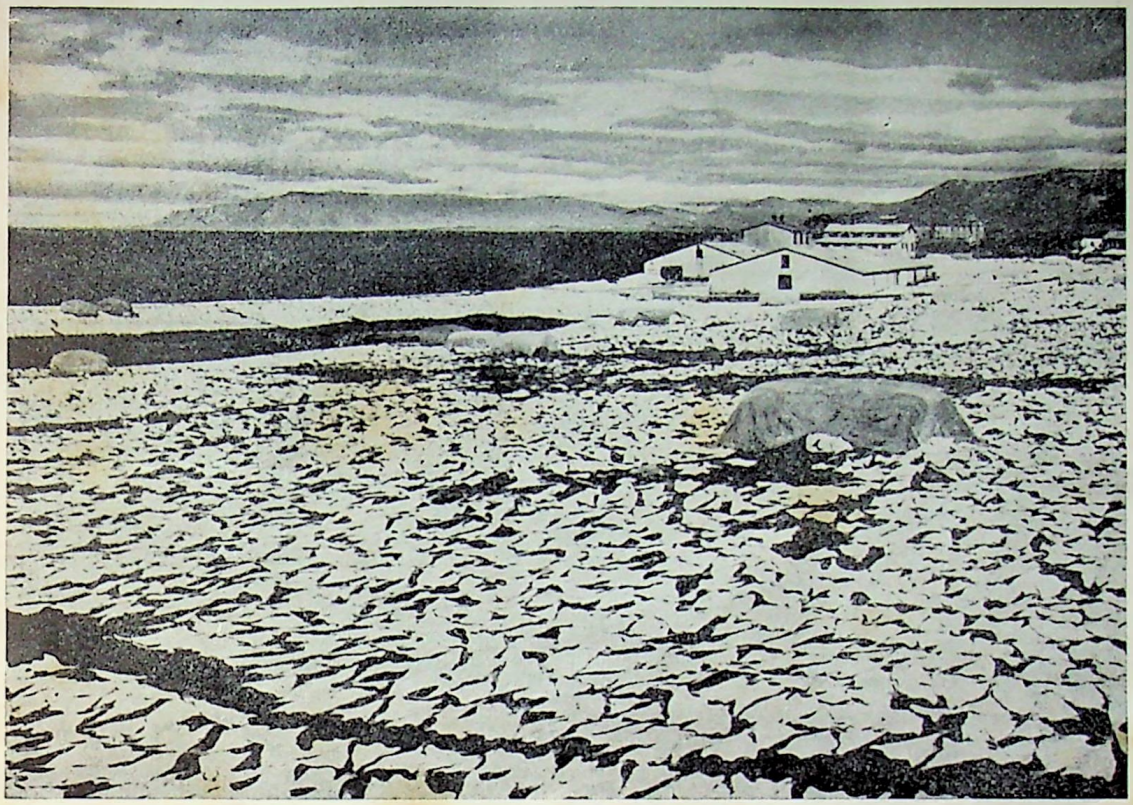
Icelandic, the language of Iceland, has remained pure and practically unchanged since the time when it was the common tongue of all northern people. Consequently, it might be called the mother tongue of the Scandinavian languages; a great many words in the English language are derived from this same source.

In Iceland there are no dialects, thanks to the national literature the Icelanders created long before any such thing was known in other parts of Northern Europe.

Early in the twelfth century the Icelanders began to write their laws and the history of their country on parchment, which was followed by the writing of the famous Icelandic "Sagas".

Fishing, Agriculture, Industry, Trade.

The Icelandic nation is one of the smallest nations in the world (population about 120,000), but its influence in the world of trade is felt far beyond what one might expect.

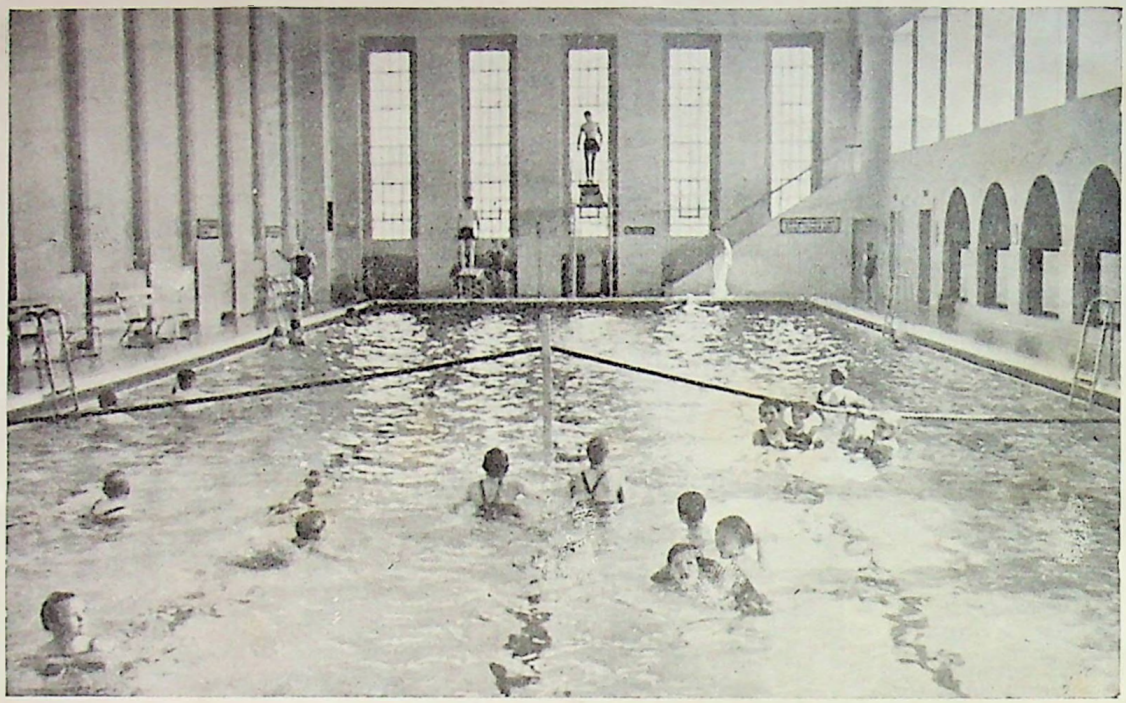


Sun-cured cod — an important product of Iceland.

The greatest factor in Iceland's economic life is the fisheries. The sea around the country is enormously rich in fish. There are two currents striking the coast of Iceland. A branch of the Gulf Stream encompasses the larger part of the coast so that the country is almost surrounded by warm water. This is the reason the climate on this arctic island is much milder than one would expect when its geographical position is taken into consideration. The other current, polar in character, comes from the north and strikes the north and east of the country.

On account of these two currents with their different types of marine plant and animal life, the sea around Iceland is rich in the growth which is the basis of life for various kinds of fish such as cod, saithe, haddock, halibut, herring and many others. Seals are numerous and millions of seabirds breed and make their homes on the seashore, on the rocks and on the many small isles around the coast. The most important of these seabirds is the eiderduck, from the nests of which the eiderdown is gathered.

The Icelandic fisheries are as old as the nation itiself. For centuries the Icelanders used virtually only rowing boats. Later on came sailing vessels, which again, in their turn, were replaced by steam



Sundhöllin (Swimming Bath) Reykjavik.

trawlers, other steamships and motorboats. Now the fishing is run on the most scientific modern lines.

But it is not only the Icelanders who enrich themselves with the abundance of the sea. There are hundreds of ships of different nationalities fishing around the coast of Iceland. During the winter nights some of the fishing banks look like moving towns, light with light, ship with ship, and fighting for the cod. But the Icelanders are, of course, best situated for these fishing grounds, and indeed they exploit them with diligence, being the fourth largest fishing nation in Europe.

Agriculture, second largest occupation of the Icelandic nation has undergone a great change although the development has been slower than in the fishing industry. Stock raising is largely pursued, the quality of the soil being suited to it. The production of vegetables is considerable and increasing. An interesting feature of this occupation is, as has been stated earlier, the ever increasing use of natural heat from the thermal springs for growing all kinds of vegetables, fruit and flowers. The possibilities in this respect are practically without limit.

There is a considerable amount of industry in Iceland, particularly in connection with the fisheries, and it is increasing rapidly.

Trade, both at home and with foreign countries, is extensive in proportion to the size of the population. The foreign trade is greater per person than that of any other country from which statistics are available. This is because Iceland has need of a great many products for which there are no raw materials in the country. On the other hand the products are some-

what one-sided. The exports consist mainly of sea products, such as fresh fish, frozen, salted and dried, herring, cod liver oil, fish-meal, and agricultural products such as meat, wool, butter, cheese, hides and skins, and eiderdown. Manufactured goods, groceries and all kinds of cereals have to be imported. In Iceland there are no mines, no coal, no salt or oil. These and all kinds of machinery must therefore be imported.

Education.

Illiteracy is unknown in Iceland, and the general level of education is considered very high. Attendance in school is compulsory for every child up to fourteen years of age. In towns the school system is not unlike what is common in the English-speaking countries. But in the country, schools have not yet been built in every district, so that in some places the teachers have to use the individual homes where the children gather. A number of schools for adults have been built in the country districts These schools are preferably erected at the side of a hot spring, and are not only heated but are also equipped with swimming baths and even steam baths.

The University is small and a number of students go abroad to various European and American countries for special studies.

The art of writing seems to be a strong inheritance because a comparatively great number of people have shown their talent in this respect. Nowhere are so many books and newspapers published yearly in proportion to the size of the population, and, in addition, there is imported a great number of foreign books, for many people read one or more foreign languages. On the bookshelves in the farmsteads may often be seen a selection of world literature in the original languages.

Communications.

Communication is, as may be expected, rather difficult in Iceland. The country is mountainous and intersected by great rivers, but the population is small. Perhaps the first thing that would strike the visitors wanting to travel about in Iceland is the absence of railways. — Nevertheless, roads fit for motor traffic total altogether over 3,000 miles with about 330 bridges, of which the majority have been built during the last two decades. The roads cover most of the populated districts, linking them together across highland and mountain passes. Motor roads are also beginning to reach up into the highland plateau. But travellers wanting to reach places outside the motor roads have to resort to ponies, both for riding and transport of goods. The Icelandic ponies are the most delightful animals, they are strong, sure-footed and intelligent. As a matter of fact there are a great many who prefer the ponies to the motor vehicles, and it is difficult to imagine a more pleasant way of spending a holiday than by going with a group of friends on horseback through certain parts of Iceland.

Before the outbreak of the war passenger steamers sailed regularly from Iceland to England, Denmark, Norway and Germany. This is, of course, somewhat changed now, and some steamers have been put on the Reykjavik—New York route. Iceland hopes for improved communications with the American countries in the near future and wishes to establish a closer cultural and commercial relationship, particularly with Canada and the United States.

Telegraph lines extend over the whole country, and submarine cables, as well as a wireless telephone system, link Iceland with the rest of the world.

V. E.

The above article first appeared in "The Canadian Geographical Journal" for October 1940, and is reprinted with their permission. It has been specially revised by the author for publication in "Northern Light".

THE ARTS IN ICELAND

Noone can be very long in Iceland without hearing something about its remarkable literary past. We hear of the Sagas, those vigorous, vivid stories of the Northmen, of the settlement of Iceland, and its early history. We hear of the great body of poetry composed by the early poets, the skálds. But we are sometimes inclined to forget that this little nation has by no means lost its love for the arts, nor its ability to produce works of art.

The written word is still undoubtedly the medium for the greater part of Iceland's artistic output, and the art of story-telling is as strong as ever it was in the Saga age. Oddly enough, though the sagas were in their way a kind of historical novel, there have been comparatively few novels produced, though some in recent years have become famous abroad through translation. What is more typical of Icelandic prose is what one might call the long short story. Volume after volume of these sketches of Icelandic life have appeared, and continue to appear. Some of their authors are as well known abroad as at home, again through translation. Most of the stories deal with Icelandic subjects, which is quite natural. It must be remembered that most Icelandic authors write in their spare time. Literary profits in a country as small as this are not very great, and in spite of the grants and pensions given by the Government most writers have to earn their living in some other way. This situation has two important results. The successful Icelandic author, unlike his opposite number in England, is still tied to his desk or his farm, and has not the chance of travelling like his brothers of the pen in other countries. He therefore chooses his subjects fom the life around him, and for this reason, to some extent, though other factors enter into it, Iceland is fortunate enough to have a modern literature which reflects its national life and thought. Few nations can have a literature so representative. The second result is probably even more important. When a man is not dependent on his pen for his livelihood he has no need to write "potboilers", and on the whole Icelandic literature does not suffer from hack writing, and the general standard is very high.

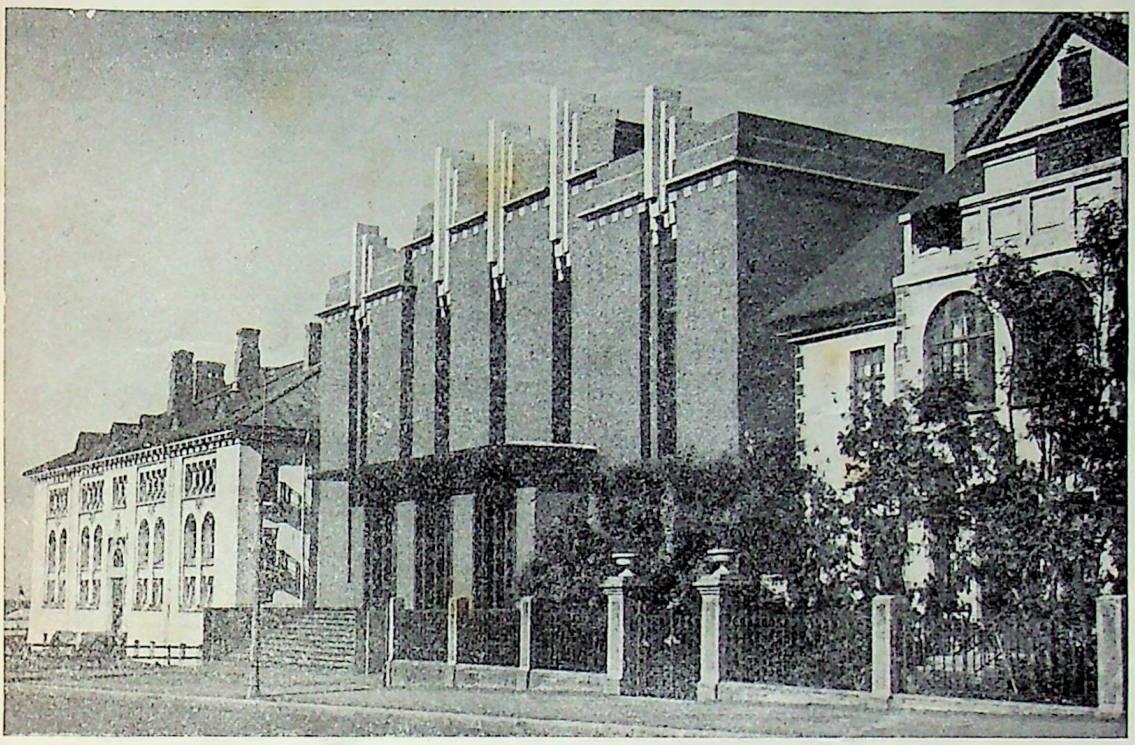
Contemporary poetry flourishes just as much as prose. Descriptive and reflective poetry are in the majority, and the poets of today handle their complicated metrical schemes with the same skill as their forefathers. There has been a natural relaxation of the strict complexities of older verseforms, but there is still the same power of concise expression, and the same true poetic spirit.

Iceland has produced comparatively few good plays. For one thing the smallness of the population has made it difficult to run many theatres, and authors have not had, to the same extent as in other countries, the incentive of probable stage production. All the same, small bands of enthusiasts have kept theatres running in various places. The Reykjavik Players' Society, consisting mainly of amateurs, with one or two full-time actors, keeps its little theatre running all through the winter with usually two plays and a revue on alternating nights. These players, working during the day, and acting at night, compare well with some of our best repertory companies.

One aspect of Icelandic literature which must not be ignored is the translation from other languages. The theatre puts on good foreign plays in translation. The best books, from almost any language, find their way into Icelandic, and there is also a body of well-translated poetry. This may not at first sight seem to be "Icelandic" art, but it is an important part of the Icelander's literary culture.

Icelandic music is much younger than the literature. There has always been a tradition of song, but orchestral development has been of comparatively recent

growth. At the present moment there are a number of very good composers. Some of the work they have already produced



Reykjavik. The National Library (left) and the National Theatre.

is of a high standard, but one may expect even better things in a few years. There are a number of orchestras in the country, of which the biggest is the Reykjavik Symphony orchestra, but most typical of Icelandic music is the choir, and particularly the male voice choir. Several Icelandic soloists have had considerable success on the Continent, both on the concert stage and in opera.

Like the music, painting and sculpture have not a long history behind them, but they have made extraordinarily quick progress. Einar Jónsson, so far the greatest Icelandic sculptor, has an exhibition gallery of his own, and has produced internationally famous work. There are a number of younger sculptors who are not far behind him, and who share his strength of line. Painting is an especially live art. It is impossible, in this short article, to attempt to assess its standard, but there is undoubtedly a large amount of good painting. The artists of Iceland are not afraid of experiment, and they are well supported by the public. Those of you who have visited Icelandic houses must have been astonished at the number of original paintings the average man has on his walls.

The other arts, wood-carving and gold

and silver work, are carried on to a much smaller extent. Probably the thing that impresses foreigners most is the beautifully delicate filigree work of the silversmiths.

It is important to remember that, with the exception of literature, the arts in Iceland are comparatively young. Up to the beginning of this century communications with the rest of the world were limited, and only the very fortunate were able to go abroad to study. Now the situation is changed, and the arts have made tremendous strides, even in the last ten years.

Finally one must not forget that although the country is large the population is very small. It is literally astonishing that 110,000 people can produce such a body of literature, such music, painting and sculpture. If one were to attempt to find an explanation it would be that in Iceland the arts are not the preserve of the few, but the prerogative of the whole nation.

ICELAND NOCTURNE — —

A strange night;
An unreal alien sky,
The moon vague in a slim cloud's low bar,
And the green curtains' pastel needles flickering
Down winding lost perspectives, reaching far
Far beyond sight, and infinitely high.
Ragged heights
Merging their pitch against the midnight's jet,
Backing a silent city; cold hard lights
Doubled in the soft smooth frozen lights
Of the sheer black still lake's even surface of steel ....

A poet would tear from this some sweet regret,
Some cosmic meaning that the stars conceal.
A poet would see, and seeing, think. And yet
I see, and only feel.

J. C. S.

ABANDON HOPE ALL YE WHO ENSA HERE

(The Editor wishes to make it clear that in printing this somewhat imaginative article he implies no lack of genuine appreciation and gratitude to the various ENSA parties who have visited Iceland and have done splendid service in entertaining the troops, often under the most difficult and discouraging conditions).

"An ENSA Concert Party is visiting Iceland. They will give a Concert in the Company Mess at 1900 hours to-day.

B. Winter, Major, R.A.M.C.
O.C. 139th Field Mobile Hospital."

At 1300 hours the notice was posted in the mess. At 1800 hours the mess was swarming with a fatigue party, rigging a makeshift stage and placing benches in position. At 1830 hours the big Nissen hut was empty. When the Company Officer looked in at 1845 hours there were three men sitting on the benches in various listless attitudes, and one R.E. who was finishing off the footlights in a hurry, as he had a date at seven.

Now the Company Officer, Lieutenant Groundsel, was conscientious and did not like these signs of apathy in the unit, so he sent one of the three men for the Sergeant-Major. The Sergeant-Major looked inside and noted that there were only two men (for the one sent by Lieutenant Groundsel had not come back). He decided that something must be done about it, so he sent for the Orderly Sergeant and returned to his interrupted drink in the mess.

The Orderly Sergeant went into the hall and found that there were still only two men who on closer examination proved to be asleep, so he decided to make a round of the huts.

He went into Hut 1 and found about a dozen men and N.C.O.s seated around Private Higworthy with looks of furious concentration on their faces. "Come on, chaps," he said, with synthetic enthusiasm, "there's an Ensa concert in five minutes. Why don't you come along and have a free show?" "Sorry," said Private Higworthy, "but you know my German class is behind already. We've simply got to finish Goethe tonight, so that they can start on Heine tomorrow."

Passing on to the next hut, he found that some of the men had gone to Althiufjordur to sketch the sunset, but the one man who was in (writing a novel) said that perhaps he would find some of the men in Hut Three with Private Heggar.

The Orderly Sergeant strode into Hut Three and started heartily, "Come on, fellows ...." but he trailed off as he saw Private Heggar dust a record with a rapt air and place it on his portable gramophone. "This," he said to the group of men around him, "is a real find. Quartette for flute, horn, harpsichord and viola da gamba, by Scarlatti." Nobody paid any attention to the Orderly Sergeant, except Private Legbury, who frowned as the door slammed in the middle of an exquisite appoggiatura.

The Orderly Sergeant walked into Hut Four, but the only occupant was Private Bunwintle. Private Bunwintle's pale blue eyes were gazing straight through the side of the Nissen hut, and on his knees was a Greek Testament, which he had evidently been reading with the aid of the Greek-Latin dictionary at his side. The Orderly Sergeant withdrew reverently, cursing under his breath.

He approached the last hut more confidently. Thank goodness, there were some low-brows in Hut 5. But all he found was a lot of loose battle-dress and boots, and a football lacer. Well, there was only one thing for it — the patients. So he went into the hospital and collected the "up" patients.

When the curtain went up—or rather was pulled to one side by the Sergeant-Major at 1920 hours, the audience consisted of a few officers and N.C.O.s, half-a-dozen men and about thirty patients, carefully seated to give the darkened hut an illusion of fulness. About ten minutes after the start a nurse came in, but that made no difference except to the comedian, who had to think of some clean stories at short notice. And when the concert had finished, the C.O. rose to say a few words. "I feel we must thank these artistes," he said, "for coming here and entertaining men who, in these outlying stations, get so little in the way of enjoyment. Thanks to them, one night at least has been won from our greatest enemy — boredom."

The Sergeant-Major clapped and went back to the mess for another drink.

J. C. S.

THE CHIT

The importance of the "chit" in the service is inestimable. Without it one's existence can be worrying and precarious and is constantly beset with numerous traps set by a variety of overbearing people. But the man who can produce the right "chit" promptly at the right time, is bound to make headway and enjoys a comfortable, tranquil life unhindered by sundry minor setbacks that have been known to make strong men weep.

The appropriately-signed "chit" is the highest authority in the British Army. The bravest of colonels and the most experienced of generals testify to its power, and even Field-Marshals are halted in their tracks by it. There is nothing in our time-honoured service that compares with its incredible influence. The fiercest of sergeants and the most vicious of corporals become almost human at the sight of the all-powerful slip of paper. It is assuredly the key to success in the armed forces. It might well be said that a genuine-looking "chit" with a convincing-looking signature might easily get Hitler a personal entry into London. A snag, of course, might be that a further "chit" would be necessary for an equally smooth exit.

All the best "chits" are typewritten. The resourceful British Army has several typewriters on active service, as it were, although many of them are veterans of uncertain vintage. Nevertheless, brief notes, labouriously hammered out on various scraps of paper, are omnipotent when the necessary official autograph has been added. Typewriting especially impresses N.C.O.s to whom the printed word is divine law.

There are two kinds of "chits". The first are definite orders; an authority for a special meal, for instance, or for a new pair of boots. The other type are really counter-orders; permission to be absent from parade, for example, or to stay out of camp later than usual. The second sort are the most eagerly sought after, possibly because the average soldier gets a mild kick out of flouting officialdom "officially", as it were.

Who, for instance, could resist the opportunity of being able to swagger in front of the sternest of military policemen wearing conspicuously neat shoes, or perhaps a natty line in coloured sweaters? You are pulled up at once, of course, with awful gravity and deliberate ostentatiousness. You are treated, correctly enough, as a public example, and the manner of reproof is intended as a warning to all service bystanders. Naturally you take it all quite meekly until the efficient copper sets about putting you under close arrest. Then, and only then, you produce your "fireproof" chit and smile

disarmingly. The result is well worth going a long way to see. Your magnificent policeman gets flustered, realises how well and truly he has been sold, and quietly wishes you elsewhere. He collapses like a pricked balloon — and all because of that supremely effective scrap of paper that you now carefully replace in your wallet.

The old soldier has a mania for "chits"; he has learned to appreciate their value. From a tattered, well-soiled assortment of odd scraps of paper he can be relied upon to produce at a moment's notice well-thumbed authority permitting him an unbelievably wide range of privileges. If there's an early morning parade, he will suddenly acquire bad feet or assume a startling temperature, with unquestionable signed authority to substantiate the malady. It is said that ability such as this is the stuff that wins wars. The Hospital is one of the main founts of "chits" for these authorised privileges and so-called physical deficiences, whose origins are often strangely remote and whose presence is at times curiously inconspicuous; the cookhouse, not surprisingly, is one of the chief recipients. Every old soldier worth his salt can convince the most doubting of M.O.'s of the presence of an ailment which is often not at all apparent. One of his most treasured "chits" permits him "light duties" only for an indefinite period.

The Orderly Room may be said to set the standard by which the integrity of "chits" may be judged. Their style is plain and to the point, and distinctly formal. If the text of the "chit" runs thus: "The undermentioned member of H.M. Forces is hereby granted authority to....", then its sucess is assured. All that remains is for the necessary signature to be appended.

All N.C.O.s are well educated in the army of to-day, and they are able to sign some "chits" although, naturally enough, not always without difficulty. An officer's signature is the best guarantee of good faith, only to be questioned by other, not always brotherly, officers. Questioning of this kind occurs quite frequently, possibly because officers do not usually read the "chits" they sign.

D. O.

OURELVES AS OTHER SEE US.

We reprint the following from a recent issue of the American paper "Newsweek": —

Word from Iceland has is that when October came to that seabound outpost and infused the Americans stationed there with the customary madness, they broke out a set of football pants, helmets, and blue-and-gold jerseys and played a pick-up football game.

The game was watched by natives and also by clusters of the British garrison. The British followed the play with interest and cheered loudly in the wrong places.

That is something the boys have got to get used to. The British are a sporting people, but they race their horses clockwise on grass, bounce the ball up to the batter, and, when in doubt, throw darts.

This magazine has, of course, been passed by the Censor, and may be posted home provided that it is not marked in any way either by pen, pencil or even pin-point.

* * *

The pictures of Icelandic scenes in this issue are re-printed from the book "100 Íslenzkar Myndir" (100 Icelandic Pictures"), price 15 kr., published by Ísafoldarprentsmiðja h.f., to whom we make grateful acknowledgements.

* * *

The next issue of this magazine will appear on March 1st 1942. Contributions, correspondence etc. will be welcomed and should be addressed to The Editor, Northern Light, Toc H Services Club, Túngata 6, Reykjavik.

"X" GENERAL HOSPITAL GROUP OF TOC H

We have very little outstanding news to report since last we had the opportunity to contribute to "Northern Light". We hold our weekly meeting on Wednesdays and have had some very interesting talks and discussions. The star turn of the month was a Gramophone Recital which we held on December 3rd. The main attraction in this was Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, and the programme included "Finlandia", and two groups of songs by Schubert sung by Richard Tauber. Our room was crowded and I think I can safely say that everyone enjoyed it. We hope to hold another such recital very soon. Two works already in hand for this are Händel's Water Music and Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 6.

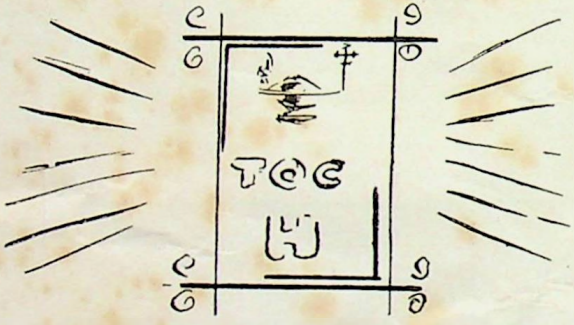
We took our part in the World Chain of Light on December 11th, and though we found it impossible owing to duties, to maintain a 24 hours vigil, we fitted in our times of watching with our mother-unit in Reykjavik.

At the time of writing we are making our plans to assist in the various Christmas activities of the Hospital. The chief of these is the Carol Choir under the direction of Padre Spear. We are going to sing carols round the wards on Christmas Eve, sing at the Midnight Mass and also at the united Carol Service on Christmas Sunday. It is hoped to have the unit band helping with this effort, and of course I must not forget to say that without the help of our good Sisters I don't know where we should be.

This, I hope, gives some idea of what we are trying to do here at the "X" General Hospital, for we always bear in mind the fact that our main field of service is that of keeping our patients happy.

We of the Group send our best wishes to all our brother members for the New Year, which we hope by God's grace will bring with it Peace.

F. B.



WHAT IS TOC H?

Toc H is out to win men's friendship and their service for the benefit of others. It stands always, but especially now, when values which seemed permanent are being discarded, for truth and understanding, for unselfishness and fair dealing, for individual freedom based on a practical Christian outlook on life.

Toc H is a Christian society. It is interdenominational, and welcomes to membership anyone who will work with it. Further particulars about the Movement can be obtained at the Toc H Services Club, Tungata 6, Reykjavik, and any one interested is invited to attend any meeting of the Toc H Services Group, held every Tuesday evening at 8.15 p.m. in the Club. (See page 9). Its Services Club in Reykjavik (and its Clubs all over the world where British troops are stationed), is open to any member of H.M. or U.S. Forces, and there is no obligation, actual or implied, to join the Toc H Movement.